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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS,
U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language and English-language dailies all gave significant reporting and editorial coverage January 12-14 to Saturday's island-wide legislative elections, in which the KMT scored a landslide victory over the ruling DPP, winning a two-thirds majority in the newly downsized 113-seat Legislature. The pro-Blue papers all rejoiced at the KMT's victory on their front pages, calling the result a no-confidence vote by the Taiwan public on the DPP's eight-year rule. The pro-Green papers, on the other hand, said the Green camp's failures in governance led to the Blue camp's victory; they also expressed worries that, with the KMT being the majority in the legislature, it will mean a regression for Taiwan's democracy. Both the pro-unification "United Daily News" and the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" front-paged Monday the results of their latest opinion surveys, which indicated that support for the KMT's Ma-Siew ticket for the March presidential poll has soared to a new high, while support for the DPP's Hsieh-Su ticket has dropped to a new low.

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "United Daily News" analysis discussed the two referenda held in tandem with Saturday's legislative elections, which failed to obtain participation by the required fifty percent of all eligible voters to pass the threshold for validity. The article expressed concern that President Chen Shui-bian will come up with more "pungent" measures to push for Taiwan independence in the run-up to the March presidential poll. A column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said the KMT should give some credit to President Chen for winning Saturday's elections. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," written by a U.S. professor at Harvard University, said, in contrast with the newspaper's normal editorial practice, that "the US does not have a national interest in helping Taiwan become a sovereign country with a seat at the UN." End summary.

13. Taiwan's Legislative Elections

A) "With Referenda Failing to Pass, Will Bian Roll out More Measures to Push for Independence?"

Journalist Lee Chih-teh wrote in an analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" circulation: 400,000 (1/13):

"The legislative elections have just concluded, and the two referenda held in tandem with the elections have also failed to pass the initial threshold, with less than 30 percent of the voter turnout. The United States and China are both happy and worried to see such a result. They are happy because the defeat of the DPP-initiated referendum on 'recovering the ill-gotten KMT party assets' may indicate that chances are slim for the 'UN referendum' to pass in March. In the meantime, they are worried whether Chen Shui-bian will come up with more pungent measures to incite the campaign for the presidential election while fearing that 'UN referendum' would fail to achieve what he has desired. ...

"The United States must be the first one to breathe a sigh of relief in seeing the defeat of the referenda, because mainland China has more than once indicated sternly to Washington that the UN referendum has stepped on the red line and that China will surely react once it is passed. Having failed to communicate with the Chen administration several times, Washington turned to urge the Taiwan people, in the hope of defusing this time bomb in a democratic way. Judged by the current situation, the United States can at least feel less tense ... about the UN referendum.

"In the wake of the DPP's severe defeat in the legislative elections, Washington and Beijing will surely be highly vigilant about the upcoming presidential poll. This is because, given his corruption case is still under investigation, Chen is facing pressure not to lose. No one is bold enough to rule out the possibility that Chen, with the aid of his trusted subordinates in the military and intelligence agencies, will try to create conflicts in the Taiwan Strait in exchange for the voters' support for the DPP and thereby conveniently impose martial law and extend his term of office. ..."

B) "A-bian Has Done Huge Credit to the KMT"

"... The DPP's defeat has not only terrified the pan-Green voters but also surprised the KMT. The KMT has not done many things right over the past few years; neither has it come up with any good policies or nominated any good candidates. But it was awarded such great kindness by the Taiwan voters Saturday. It has no one but A-bian to thank for its victory. It is not the KMT that has defeated the DPP, which still maintains its basic support rate of 38 percent. The DPP was defeated by A-bian this time. Bian has turned this legislative election into his personal campaign; the more he threw himself into the campaigning, the stronger the backlash against the DPP became. ...

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"This legislative election [result] came as a severe punishment for A-bian; it was also good instructional material for democracy. The defeat for the DPP may not necessarily indicate a regression of democracy. Once the system of power transfer is firmly established, democracy will become more stabilized. Democracy and reforms are not a monopoly of any political party. But the test for the KMT has yet to start."

14. U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations

"Taiwan and Fear in US-China Ties"

Joseph S. Nye, a professor at Harvard University, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (1/14):

"... In principle, cross-strait tensions need not lead to conflict. With increasing change in China and growing economic and social contacts across the Strait, it should be possible to find a formula that allows the Taiwanese to maintain their market economy and democratic system without a placard at the UN. The US has tried to allow for this evolution by stressing two themes: no independence for Taiwan and no use of force by China. But given the danger that could grow out of political competition in Taiwan or impatience in the People's Liberation Army, the US would be wise to encourage more active contacts and negotiations between the two sides. The US has a broad national interest in maintaining good relations with China, as well as a specific human rights interest in protecting Taiwan's democracy. But the US does not have a national interest in helping Taiwan become a sovereign country with a seat at the UN, and efforts by some Taiwanese to do so present the greatest danger of a miscalculation that could create enmity between the US and China. Some Chinese already suspect the US of seeking an independent Taiwan as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" against a future Chinese enemy. They are wrong, but such suspicions can feed a climate of enmity. ..."

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